

W5YI

America's Oldest Ham Radio Newsletter

REPORT

Up to the minute news from the world of amateur radio, personal computing and emerging electronics. While no guarantee is made, information is from sources we believe to be reliable.

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VECs Hold Annual Conference with FCC Officials

The 1998 edition of the National Conference of VECs got underway on July 9th as NCVEC Chairman Win Guin, W2GLJ called the meeting to order. VEC organizations representing more than 95% of all examinations administered in the Amateur Service attended the two day meeting.

A VEC acts as the link between the volunteer examiner (VE) community and the FCC. Their function is to provide testing guidance, license examination materials and electronic filing of license applications for their accredited VE teams.

The VEC System consists of 15 VEC organizations who oversee the activities of an estimated 3000 VE teams and some 30,000 accredited VEs. They meet annually with Washington DC and Gettysburg PA Federal Communication Commission officials to discuss Amateur Service examining and licensing issues.

The Thursday program included a discussion and slide program led by Fred Maia entitled **Amateur Radio in the Twentieth Century**. Discussed was the decline in the number of examinations administered under the VEC System.

Growth and trends in the Amateur Service

It was pointed out that ten years ago (1988), 60% of all amateurs held high speed code tickets ...that is, General Class and higher. Ten years later, more than 60% of all amateurs hold a no-code

Tech or a slow code Tech or Novice ticket.

For the third year in a row, there are less total General/Advanced and Extra Class licensees than the year before. And there are also less Tech Plus operators for two years in a row ...and less Novice Class operators every year for the past five years.

The Amateur Service has grown by a little more than 200,000 participants since 1991 with just about all of the growth coming at the Codeless Technician level.

Another way to track the health of Amateur Radio is by license examinations. Testing of Amateur Radio applicants peaked in 1992 when there were more than 10,000 examination sessions — each with nearly an average of 12 applicants. Nearly 116,000 applicants were administered nearly 194,000 examination elements that year. This year, the average examination session had less than 6 applicants. And if the trend for the first half of the year holds up, only about 52,000 people will be administered 85,000 examination elements ...a decrease of more than 50% over just 4 years ago.

The licensing figures don't look any better. For the year ending in June 1996, an average of 2,500 new amateurs were licensed every month. This dropped to 2,000 in 1997. And for the 12 months ending June 30, 1998, the number of first time licensed amateurs dropped to a monthly rate of about 1,500. (85% of all new amateurs enter Amateur Radio at the No-Code Technician level.).

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While the No-Code Technician ranks are growing, interest in joining ham radio - even at the Code-less Technician level - is still down 40% since 1996.

Although the reduction is not as bad, there is also a consistent drop in the number of amateurs upgrading their licenses. The average for the year ended June 30, 1996 was 1350. This dropped to 1250 the following year. The monthly average number of upgrades is now under 1,000 — a 35% decrease in just three years!

The statistics also show that 82% of all No-Code Technicians licensed during the year ended June 1996 have not upgraded their license. So it appears that most No-Code Techs are either happy with their VHF/UHF privileges — or don't want to learn the Morse code — or both.

What do all these figures mean?

"Basically it means that there is less interest in ham radio," Maia said. "On the surface it might appear that since the No-Code Technician ranks are expanding and the number of code proficient Amateurs dwindling, that the Morse code requirement may be the culprit. This is only half the story. The fact is that the Technician growth rate is sharply down — more than 55% — from what it was in the early 1990s. Amateur radio is in the doldrums. And it could get worse unless action is taken."

The question then becomes, "Why is this happening?" Fred Maia said he believed it "...is because a lot of the 'magic' of analog ham radio is gone now that the world has entered the digital age. Ham radio used to be called upon when an emergency occurred. And we were all proud that we had radio communications — even a way to make phone calls — from our car. A lot of that slack is now taken up by cheap cellular phones."

"Contacting a friend more reliably in a foreign land is now a 'snap' with a computer and the Internet. As the Internet speeds up, two way full-motion video Internet contacts worldwide will become a reality. And you won't have to wait for when the conditions are right. The cost of a computer now is about the same as a DX radio. And the computer can be used for a whole lot more than just communications."

"Practically everyone I know has cellular, computer and Internet capability," Maia said. "I believe there is a close parallel between the reduction in analog Amateur Radio interest and the expansion of extremely low-cost digital communications. Remember, no license is required on the Internet ...and there are no FCC regulations. Basically anything goes."

Where does this leave Amateur Radio?

"Amateur Radio in the Twenty-First Century will be different — and it must be different — if we are to survive. Amateur radio, I think is too complex. I believe we

have too many rules and too many restrictions. We seem to spend more time and effort protecting the status quo and revisiting the past than moving on to the real purpose of Amateur Radio which is communicating with our friends, experimenting with new technologies, interesting people in electronics ...and public service."

What is going on in other countries

The United States is not the only country that has seen a decline in Amateur Radio interest. Some are doing something about it.

"Here is a verbatim statement from the June 1998 of *RadCom*, the journal of the Radio Society of Great Britain. The RSGB president said, 'Our hobby is in need of stimulation. The numbers of radio amateurs are falling in many parts of the world and this trend is an unhealthy one for the future of amateur radio.'

"The Amateur Service is indeed fortunate to have many valuable frequency bands. Believe me when I say that less interest in ham radio by the public translates to renewed efforts by the commercial radio services to obtain our allocations. It is already happening!"

"The RSGB will no longer support the Morse code requirement for operation below 30 MHz at the next ITU World Radio Conference in 2001. They believe 'Morse is but one more among many in current use, and it should take its place alongside the others as an equal.' (Another quote from *RadCom*.)

The RSGB is also asking their Radiocommunication Agency to permit access by their VHF/UHF Class B code-free licensees to the HF bands after passing a 5 words-per-minute code exam. And they are looking for ways to may entry into Amateur Radio easier."

"The German government has just completed a major restructuring of their Amateur Service. Their Class A, B and C system is now class 1, 2 and 3. Their old Class A 'Novice' license required 6 words-per-minute code to access a few HF bands. All Class A licenses have now been converted to a Class 1 all-band top-of-the-line license. That's like making their Novices, Extra Class operators!"

"Another big surprise was the adoption of a new Class 3 - which is basically a 'try it see if you like it' ham radio class. It features a reduced technical examination permits 10-watt operation on 2-meters and 70-cm (the 450 MHz band.)

"Frankly, I kind of liked that approach," Maia said. "As a member of the Question Pool Committee, I have never been able to understand why new VHF/UHF operators need to know — for example, electronic circuits — when all use commercial mobile and hand held transceivers."

"I'm sure we can come up with all sorts of reasons why vast electronic knowledge is needed. But let's not

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forget that there are no rules, examinations or regulations on the Internet ...and as technical and confusing as it can be, some 50 million American's are managing just fine on the web. Let's save the complex stuff for the higher class licenses."

"The national amateur radio society of Canada, *Radio Amateurs of Canada* has just petitioned their regulatory agency, *Industry Canada* seeking increased HF band access for holders of their "Basic" VHF/UHF no-code license. Canada, by the way, has no CW sub-bands. They too, seem to be managing just fine."

"And Argentina has just reduced their 10 words-per-minute General Class requirement and 15 words-per-minute Superior Class requirement to that of their Intermediate Class which requires only a 7 words-per-minute proficiency."

"All around the globe, less importance is being placed on Morse proficiency and more emphasis on making amateur radio more accessible to the public."

The FCC's Biennial Review

It now appears that the United States will also be taking action to revitalize its Amateur Service.

The Communications Act requires the FCC to review all of its regulations applying to licensees in every even-numbered year. On February 19th, the FCC adopted a list of 31 items to be explored as part of the 1998 Biennial Review. "One of those items looked toward 'streamlining the Amateur Service ...to privatize further the administration of the Amateur Radio Services ...and to simplify the licensing process.' No further information was released."

"The rumors are strong that less license classes will be proposed' - perhaps three - and Morse code examination requirements will be relaxed. We even heard that 5 words-per-minute might be the top speed — or just 5 and 13."

The American Radio Relay League has petitioned the FCC to take additional steps taken to prevent applicants with a questionable handicap from obtaining a medical waiver of the 13 and 20 words-per-minute code exams.

"The waiver issue would become a moot point if the Amateur Service code speed requirement is dropped to 5 words-per-minute, Maia said."

Universal Licensing System

The Friday meeting which started at 9:00 a.m., Friday, July 10, 1998 was also attended by key FCC officials from both Gettysburg, PA and Washington, DC. They included (from Washington, DC), Bill Cross Ira Kelpz, Tom Fitz-Gibbon and Division Chief Ms. D'wana Terry — and (from Gettysburg) Judy Dunlap, Donna

Scott, Darlene Reeder, Mary Shultz, Steve Linn, Larry Weikert, and Kirk McKee. Cathy Ganek, (an FCC contract programmer), author Gordon West WB6NOA and publisher, Pete Trotter from Master Publishing were also in attendance.

After introductions, a report was given by Ray Adams W4CPA, chairman of the VECs Question Pool Committee. The 4A (Advanced Class) pool will be updated this coming year for implementation July 1, 1999. Ray said that the biggest need of the QPC is for potential questions and answers submitted by the ham community.

Bill Cross then gave the FCC Report and afterwards introduced Ira Kelpz who heads up the implementation of the new Universal licensing System, the FCC's new licensing initiative

ULS is an automated licensing system now in development that will be used to handle the future licensing of all wireless radio services regulated by the FCC's *Wireless Telecommunications Bureau* — including the Amateur Service. When fully operational, ULS will replace eleven separate licensing systems and databases now being used for various wireless services. It will support full electronic filing of all license applications.

The new ULS will also consolidate all service-specific application and licensing rules into a single set of rules (to be located in Part 1 of the FCC rules) for all wireless radio services. And over 40 existing wireless application forms will be replaced with five new forms.

The FCC Form 610 will be replaced by a multi-purpose Form 605 which will be used by Ship, Aviation, Amateur, GMRS and Commercial Radio operators. The new system will use the *Taxpayers Identification Number* (TIN) — in the case of Amateur Radio, their 9-digit Social Security Number (SSN) — as the 'key' with which to identify the record.

There was a discussion among the VECs about the appropriateness of using an applicant's SSN due to privacy and security concerns. The FCC had said that access to an applicant's social security number would be limited to FCC personnel. It was pointed out, however, that some 30,000 volunteer examiners would also have access to them since they would appear on the application Form 605 that they must review and certify.

Several VECs expressed concern as to their liability if Social Security numbers were used to complete the Form 605. Also discussed was the fact that not all FCC-licensed amateurs have an SSN — since some, such as foreign nationals and applicants from some U.S. possessions (such as Puerto Rico) do not have them. Ira Kelpz said that the FCC was looking into this and an alternate system may be developed.

Ira Kelpz said that collection of an applicants TIN was required by the *Debt Collection Improvement Act* as

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part of an effort to increase collection from private entities of delinquent government debts. The FCC is required to share SSNs with the U.S. Treasury to ensure that the Commission does not refund monies to applicants who have an outstanding debt with the federal government.

Another concern of the VECs is that the *Schedule C* that will be used by Amateur operators in conjunction with the Form 605 does not contain much of the needed information that was previously on the FCC Form 610. It does not provide for license classes ...or certification by three VEs. It also does not provide for applicants to apply for new or upgraded licenses, changing a call sign, and neither the new RF safety statement ...or the *Physician's Certification of Disability*.

The new proposed rules, however, indicate that this information should be on the Schedule C. Ira Kelpz said that there was a deadline to meet and that this may have been overlooked. He said that an answer might be for the VECs to prepare their own worksheet which could contain information needed by the VEC System — but not necessarily by the FCC. More information on this will be forthcoming.

"The goal is to have as few changes as possible over the present system," Kelpz said. VECs will be permitted to write their own electronic filing software. The FCC is also looking into rewriting the original input software they provided the VECs.

Ira Kelpz said that he anticipated that the new Universal Licensing System would be extended to the Amateur Service "...in the first or second quarter of 1999."

The Amateur Biennial Review item

Division Chief Ms. D'wana Terry addressed the VECs who were quite interested in learning more about the rumored restructuring of the Amateur Service. Ever since the FCC Forum presented by staffer Bill Cross at the Dayton HamVention, the guesstimates have been strong that the FCC would propose a reduction in the number of Amateur Classes — perhaps to three — and de-emphasize Morse code testing. (Possibly 5 words-per-minute would be the top exam speed — or just 5 and 13.)

Ms. Terry called the Biennial Review an "administrative convenience look at service regulations ...a way of streamlining and eliminating unnecessary rules." She said she was limited in what she could say about the Amateur item since it was still being worked on by the Commission.

"How can we make licensing more efficient?" she asked. "Does the number of different license classes make sense? Should there be a change in the categories of elements?" She mentioned a previous [failed] attempt by the FCC to rewrite the Amateur Service rules

into easier to understand plain language.

Ms. Terry said that the division was trying to look at various pending issues. "People file a lot of things and we are trying to clean up the backlog. Nothing is carved in concrete. Amateurs are very zealous in ideas they hold dear." She said there was "...a need for public comment and [information on] what will work." She acknowledged that the amateur rule making item would be out shortly — but that "...it won't be earth shattering." She asked the VECs to "Think constructively and suggest alternatives. Let us know if we have overlooked something [once it is released.]"

Bill Cross gave a history of the 13 and 20 words-per-minute code waivers in the Amateur Service. Ms. Terry acknowledged that one of the things the FCC was looking at was a reduction in the Morse code examination speed as a way around the need to grant code waivers.

The original Amateur rule making was rumored to be a straight Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. The NPRM has apparently now been returned by the Commissioners to the Division for amendment. In any event, Ms. Terry said the rulemaking will partially be "...framed as discussion topics and some will be specific proposals." D'wana said the item is on the "fast track", but no release date can be set, although "...some time this year is expected."

Gordon West WB6NOA asked "How are comments on a proposal digested by the FCC?" Ms. Terry said that comments are collected, read, summarized and analyzed, then a decision is made based on the sense of the comments. If the comments are mixed, a finer analysis than usual is completed. The staff, division and bureaus all get a chance to edit the analysis before it is presented to the Commissioners for a decision. All comments are read, whether or not they are in correct formal format. Electronically-filed comments receive the same weight as comments submitted on paper..

The ARRL/VEC asked that the comment period be adequate to permit publishing in magazines (such as QST) that require a long lead time. Ms. Terry said that the comment period would be longer than 30 days with 15 days for replies but possibly not as long as 90 days.

Ms. Terry also asked that the VECs "touch base" with the division [report to her] once a quarter about issues that are of concern to them. This will be handled by the VECs Rules Committee.

The FCC's Larry Weikert addressed the VECs concerning FCC licensing issues. He handed out several documents including a VEC Statistical Report and the most recent census of U. S. Amateur radio operators.

The VECs agreed that they would hold their 1999 NCVEC Conference on the same weekend as this year — July 8 and 9, 1999.

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■ **Apple pins its future on a new Internet PC. It's highly anticipated "iMac" consumer computer goes on sale August 15th!** All iMacs will ship with a 56K modem and a variety of bundled consumer software (Appleworks, Quicken'98, Guide to Good Cooking, Internet Explorer ...and more!) A wide assortment of peripheral and software products will support the iMac.

The \$1299 machine includes a 233-MHz PowerPC microprocessor, 32 MB of RAM, 512K of cache, 4 GB hard disk, 24X CD-ROM drive, and 56K modem. The built-in 15-inch monitor (with 1024 x768 resolution), keyboard and mouse are included. The downside is that iMac will be the FIRST desktop Mac to ship without a floppy drive!

Apple founder, Steve Jobs was deeply involved in the development of iMac. The stock market has already discounted its success and apparently believes the iMac will sell like hot cakes. Apple shares have tripled since the beginning of the year!

■ **Cheap NC devices, however, are not selling!** An NC (network computer) is a bare-bones machine that has no floppy or hard disk. Only 144,000 were sold last year. Sales of sub-\$1,000 PCs, on the other hand, have been skyrocketing!

■ **Reinventing the phone system. -- AT&T says it will take 30 months to get its newly acquired cable TV holdings ready for residential telephoning over the Internet.** The cost will be an additional \$4.4 billion. Investors are skeptical and AT&T shares have been falling.

AT&T says it will offer all-in-one telephone, high-speed Internet and video (cable) services to the residential market. A new variety of set-top boxes will take digital signals and convert them to analog signals allowing the new system to deliver up to 300 channels.

■ **Internet phoning, however, may not be as cheap as first thought.** The regional Bell operating companies are telling the FCC that Internet carriers must pay the same access fees -- as much as 10¢ a minute -- as any other phone company.

At present, access charges are avoided by sending voice communications over data connections which are exempt. Internet phone calls cost an average of 6.5¢ a minute. Their advantage is gone if they have to pay access fees. There are now between 20,000 and 50,000 consumer Internet phone users worldwide.

In February, Denver-based Quest Communications began offering long distance calls over the Internet for 7.5¢ a minute. And AT&T is gearing up its new "Connect'N Save" Internet phone service for operation (7.5¢-9¢ a minute) in several markets later on this year. A leading research company says that even traditional calls are expected to fall to 8¢ a minute by 2002.

By the end of the century, Internet telephoning with full motion video will be commonplace. Companies have already begun production of Internet phones with 4" LCD screens, e-mail and Internet browsing capability. Cost will be in the \$600 range.

■ **Be sure to check out the Web real-estate brokers if you are buying a home!** You will save big bucks!

Microsoft continues to launch consumer Internet-based businesses - especially those where commission salespeople and broker fees may be involved. **Its automobile (CarPoint), investing (Microsoft Investor) and travel site (Expedia) is now joined by HomeAdvisor -- an on-line home-buyers' guide.**

The objective is to bring together home buyers, sellers and various real-estate related agents. Their listing already consists of 400,000 homes for sale. Income comes from origination and referral fees paid by lenders and title companies ...and from advertising. The fee ("points") received by a web broker is about half to one-third charged by traditional mortgage brokers. Intuit's Quicken is also competing in the fast-growing online mortgage market. (See: <<http://homeadvisor.msn.com/>> and <<http://quickenmortgage.com/>>)

You can even check out the selling price of a home for sale down the street from you by entering your address or zip code! I have tried it and it works!

■ **The "Name your own price" revolution!** You have probably heard of Hartford, CT-based Priceline.com. They are the outfit that lets you bid for leisure airline tickets over the Internet.

They have already sold over 30,000 tickets since their launch in April ...and even sold 1,000 tickets alone on June 9th. Priceline.com is quietly adding one additional airline to their service every week. They now rank among the nation's top 10 leisure airline ticket sellers! It's a hush-hush business. To protect their regular fares, none have publicly admitted to their association with Priceline.

Now Priceline is adding automobiles and trucks. And they are looking into hotel rooms, mortgages, vacation packages and cruises, personal computers, insurance, ...and a host of other products.

The concept is the same for each: consumers name a price they are willing to pay for an airline ticket, a new car, or something else. If a subscribing business agrees, the sale is made. The missing element is the (costly) salesman, commissions and marketing costs.

Car buying is new to Priceline and it has just started in New York City. Here is how it works. You visit Priceline.com and fill out a Priceline Vehicle Request specifying the exact make and model of the car you want (including color and options.)

You indicate the price you are willing to pay, the date you want the car, and how far you are willing to travel from a factory authorized dealer. Priceline.com not only tells the MSRP (manufacturer suggested retail price) but also the dealer's invoice cost.

An e-mail tells you where to pick up the car. There is a \$200 cancellation charge if your price is accepted and you don't pick up the car. After the sale is complete, Priceline.com charges a \$25 service charge to your credit card. Neat!

■ **Little known Houston, TX-based Zapata, Inc., thinks that the Internet is the business of the future!** The one time oil driller tried to buy the popular "Excite" Internet service a couple of months ago for \$1.7 billion. But was rejected.

The sausage casing and fish oil company (really!) is now buying or investing in existing websites and will develop their own portal to the web. (Before you laugh, remember that the \$6 billion Gateway 2000 company's roots are in dairy farming!)

So far Zapata owns 22 different sites, including *Starting Point* (a search engine), *Chat Planet* (chat network), *Stocksheet* (financial research), *Travel Page* (travel agent), *Rock Mail* (a game site), *Advancing Women* (website for working women) and several electronic commerce sites (book, music, computer sellers, ...and so forth.)

They say they will be -- and have the resources to be -- one of the ten largest websites in the world! The financial community is taking them very seriously. On July 6th, their stock more than doubled! So far, they have tied all of the sites together to: <<http://www.zap.com>>. If you have a website you would like to sell, contact Zapata at: aag@zap.com. They

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are buying!

Netscape has also remodeled their site and it too is trying to become a entrance (portal) to the Internet. They gained 32% on July 1st. Lycos gained 25% on July 6th. Really wild for companies that don't have any earnings!

■ In the hotly-contested browser race, Microsoft's Internet Explorer is apparently catching up with Netscape's Navigator and Communicator.

Zona Research of Redwood City, CA released its latest browser census which shows that 54% of PC users have Netscape as their primary browser with 45% using Microsoft's IE. In September, Netscape's share was 62%. Zona began tracking browser market trends in 1996.

Month	Netscape	IE	Other
April 1996	87%	4%	9%
Aug. 1996	83%	8%	9%
Jan. 1997	70%	28%	2%
Sept. 1997	62%	36%	2%
July 1998	54%	45%	1%

■ A "MonicaCam" has been set up outside of the entrance of Lewinsky's new lawyer for those who absolutely have to keep track of the ex-White House intern. <<http://www.webdevs.com/monicacam>> The site bills itself as the *Unofficial Home of the Lewinsky Legal Team*.

■ AMTA wants commercial "spectrum refarming" expedited. The *American Mobile Telecommunications Association* is seeking tougher guidelines from the FCC that would force commercial radio operators to utilize spectrally-efficient radio equipment.

They want a date set by which commercial users must move to more efficient narrow-band technologies. AMTA has suggested a transition that would take place over 20 years.

The "mandatory migration" (spectrum refarming) will take the pressure off of amateur spectrum since it would free up thousands of additional private and commercial channels nationwide.

■ Representatives of the broadcast, cable and electronic industries testified before Congress that they are ready for the rollout of high-definition television (HDTV.) Major broadcast networks and many cable TV operators will begin at least some HDTV broadcasts this fall, especially during prime time viewing hours.

But some technical problems still exist.

Current models of VCRs and DVD players will not work with HDTV and new digital forms of these accessories will not be available this fall. And only the high-end HDTV sets will be able to transmit the 18 different formats available.

In order to encourage broadcasters to introduce HDTV, the U.S. government has given the new digital spectrum to broadcasters free of charge. In exchange, they must gradually introduce digital television between now and 2006. At that time, the old analog signal spectrum is to be returned to the government for auctioning.

■ The Presidents Council on Year 2000 Conversion has issued a new Fact Sheet on the year 2000 dilemma. See: <<http://www.y2k.gov>> It says the problem poses a serious threat to the global economy in which Americans live and work since it is dependent upon electronic processing. The good news is that it is solvable and primarily a management problem. Federal agencies started working on the problem a decade ago. Domestic and international organizations, however, face major risks to their operations if they do not upgrade their systems. (Fact Sheet issued July 10, 1998)

■ Add Turkey to the countries that have third party traffic and reciprocal licensing privileges with the United States.

We received an e-mail from Don Weiland who works in the International Spectrum Policy Branch of the FCC's International Bureau.

He thanked us for bringing to his attention the fact that Turkey has been added to the list of third-party and reciprocal licensing countries.

We stumbled upon this fact by sheer accident a couple of weeks ago so we sent a message to the FCC asking for clarification. We found the information when we were doing our twice-a-month routine searching of government websites (in this case, the State Department) seeking information about Amateur Radio.

Don wrote: "The Treaty Office at the Department of State did confirm that both an amateur third party and an amateur reciprocal agreement were signed at Ankara on November 27, 1996. The two agreements entered into force on the same date that they were signed. Unfortunately, we didn't get notified of this."

"We used to get a hard copy of State's Treaty Actions which came out once a

month, but for some reason (maybe funding) this was discontinued."

■ The Washington, DC-based non-profit Foundation for Amateur Radio, Inc., recently announced winners of 67 scholarships which it administers. The scholarships range in value from \$500 to \$2,500 each. Over \$60,000 was awarded.

These scholarships were open to all licensed radioamateurs meeting the qualifications and residence requirements of the various sponsors. Hugh Turnbull, W3ABC (Chairman of the Scholarship Committee) said "The announcement for our 1999 awards will appear in the January or February issues of major Amateur Radio publications and selected radio club newsletters."

He also pointed out that FAR Scholarships has a new address: P.O. Box 831, Riverdale, MD 20738.

■ Amateur licensing statistics posted to the Joe Speroni (AH0A) website (located at: <<http://www.speroni.com>>) show that the number of Amateurs that hold licenses requiring Morse code proficiency has shrunk over the past year. Here is his June 1998 versus June 1997 figures by license class.

They differ from the FCC census that we published last month in that Amateurs whose license has expired, but still in the FCC database, have been eliminated.

The bottom line is that even though the number of Codeless Technicians increased by 11,500 last year, there are still nearly 4,400 less total amateurs than a year ago because there are nearly 16,000 less amateurs with Morse proficiency. Here is the breakdown:

Licenses requiring Morse Proficiency

Month	Extra	Advanced	General	Tech Plus	Novice
6/98	74274	104509	112977	135737	60125
6/97	73737	107024	116629	139608	66551
Incr.	+537 (2515)	(3652)	(3871)	(6426)	
Net Coded Decrease: (15,927)					

License not requiring Morse Code

Month	Technician	All Amateurs
6/98	186458	674080
6/97	174924	678473
Increase	+11,534	(4,393)
Net Codeless Increase: 11,534		
Decrease in all Amateurs: (4,393)		

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The following story -- originally distributed on the Reuters Newswire -- was sent to us (twice) by different readers. It tells of the approaching implementation of the GMDSS - the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System - on February 1, 1999 and the demise of manual telegraphy on the high seas.

Maritime Morse Is Tapped Out

Reuters News Service - July 6, 1998

Morse code -- which has signaled disasters at sea since the sinking of the Titanic -- is slipping silently into the sea. As of February 1999, passenger and cargo ships of 300 gross tons or more will no longer use Morse code for SOS calls.

The beginning of the end came in 1988, when an international treaty on safety and rescue at sea was amended to phase out Morse worldwide, beginning in 1992, in favor of the satellite communications setup dubbed the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System.

US civilian ships dropped Morse for distress calls in 1995. On 31 January 1997, France's coast guard tapped out its final, poetic message -- "Calling all. This is our last cry before our eternal silence."

The fading away of Morse at sea provides food for thought on how new technologies change the world, only to fall by the wayside when the next new thing comes along.

The telegraph was the information superhighway of the 19th century, enabling rapid communication between distant cities and across oceans. The first public telegram was sent from Washington DC to Baltimore in 1844 by inventor and artist Samuel F.B. Morse, who tapped out "What hath God wrought?" in a demo for Congress.

The first sea rescue resulting from a radio telegraph message came in 1899, when a lightship in the Dover Straits reported the grounding of the steamship Elbe, according to the International Maritime Organization, a UN agency.

But it was the legendary sinking of the Titanic in 1912 and the loss of more than 1,500 lives that spurred the use of radio by ships at sea. Although 700 people were saved when the liner Carpathia picked up the Titanic's distress call, fewer might have died had the California, which was relatively close to the Titanic, also received the doomed ship's call for help. The California's wireless operator was off duty.

Three months after the disaster, an international conference in London decided that, while all ships did not have to have radio equipment aboard, some craft should have to maintain a permanent radio watch.

At the same 1912 conference, the letters "SOS" -- dot dot dot, dash dash dash, dot dot dot in Morse -- were adopted as the international distress call. Before, it had

been "CQD."

"Contrary to popular myth, the letters are not an abbreviation (for 'Save Our Souls') and have no special significance except that ... (they are) easy to remember and transmit in the Morse code," the International Maritime Organization said in a paper on the subject.

As time passed, Morse began losing some of its importance at sea. As early as 1907, a radiotelephone was installed on a Hudson River ferry boat by Lee de Forest, whose invention of an electronic component made wireless voice communication possible.

In 1975, radiotelephone equipment was recommended for all ships more than 300 gross tons by the International Maritime Organization. Six years later, it was made mandatory in an amendment to the treaty known as the International Convention on the Safety of Lives at Sea.

Why scrap conventional radio in favor of satellites? According to the International Maritime Organization, its drawbacks include, in the case of Morse, the need for years of training and practice.

There are other reasons, too: reception problems, uncertainty of the message being received and the air-wave congestion that came with the development of radio on land.

So what's taking old-fashioned radio's place? A network of satellites: two positioned above the Atlantic Ocean and one each over the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. Only the North and South poles, where shipping is infrequent, go uncovered.

Big cargo ships and passenger liners will also have to carry equipment designed to improve the chances of rescue, including satellite radio beacons to indicate a vessel's location in an emergency and search-and-rescue transponders for ships and survival craft.

This is not to say that Morse is dead. The US military still uses Morse. On Navy ships, for example, sailors have to know how to use lights to flash out ship-to-ship messages in the code. And the Federal Communications Commission requires proficiency in Morse for some amateur radio licenses.

Morse has its fans. Recent searches of the Web and discussion groups on the Internet turned up thousands of Web pages and hundreds of discussion group postings containing the words "Morse code." Which leads one to wonder what will overtake the Internet, where it will come from, and when.

RADIO PIONEER FRED LINK, ex-W2ALU, SK

Fred M. Link, a pioneer in land mobile radio communications, died at age 93 on June 18, 1998 in New Jersey. His company, Link Radio Corp., was the foremost manufacturer of police radio equipment in the 1930s and

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1940s.

U.S. armed forces extensively used Link radios during World War II, especially for communications among tank commanders and to replace wired telephone and teletype.

For the past 30 years, one of Link's passions had been his leadership in the Radio Club of America, a New York-based society of radio engineers, executives, managers and specialists; broadcasters; university faculty; military communications specialists; and amateurs. He served as Radio Club president from 1968 to 1992, and continued as president emeritus.

Link received the 1984 Centennial Medal of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. An IEEE Electrical Engineering Milestone plaque at the entrance of the Connecticut Department of Public Safety headquarters in Middletown, Connecticut, commemorates the 1939 installation of the first FM police radio communications system, built by Link Radio. It was the success of this system that led to the adoption of FM radio for communications by the Mechanized Cavalry (tanks) based in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, for use in World War II.

As a radio amateur, holding such calls as 3OV, 3BVA, 2ALU, NU2ALU and eventually W2ALU, his achievements included contact with the Byrd expedition to the South Pole and construction of the first remote-controlled amateur station. (Thanks: Don Bishop, W0WO)

CONFERENCE TO EXPLORE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

ARRL and the Tucson Amateur Packet Radio Corp. (TAPR) have announced their 17th Annual Digital Communications Conference, to take place Sept. 25-27, 1998 at the Holiday Inn in Rolling Meadows, IL, near O'Hare Airport in Chicago.

In addition to the main session presentations, events include a dinner speech by Steve Roberts, N4RVE, pioneer in bicycle and maritime mobile radio and computing; seminars on RUDAK operations; packet networks with "millions or billions of stations;" infrastructure technologies in Amateur Radio; beginner sessions on digital topics; and the Second Annual Amateur Packet Reporting System (APRS) National Symposium.

The pre-registration deadline (\$42.00) is Sept. 1; registration after Sept. 1 is \$47.00. Conference papers must be submitted by August 15. For information contact TAPR on the Internet at <<http://www.tapr.org>> - e-mail: tapr@tapr.org; or by phone 940-383-0000.

NON-RENEWAL OF KV4FZ's LICENSED UPHELD

The FCC released a decision on July 8th affirming that the Extra Class ham ticket of KV4FZ (Herb Schoenbohm of Kingshill, U.S. Virgin Islands) should not be renewed. The Administrative Law Judge found that

"Schoenbohm engaged in misrepresentation and lacked candor in his testimony regarding his felony telephone fraud conviction..." The FCC said his "...behavior, in combination with the fraud conviction itself, justifies non-renewal of Schoenbohm's [amateur station and operator] licenses." The Commission also found that KV4FZ encouraged others to contact political figures to act in his behalf which is prohibited by the rules.

Schoenbohm was convicted in federal court for knowingly using a telephone access code to defraud a Virgin Islands long-distance telephone company. He was sentenced to two months house arrest, given two years probation, and ordered to pay a fine of \$5,000.

Schoenbohm's license expired in 1995. But KV4FZ has been operating his station ever since pending the outcome of his latest hearing. He has now been ordered to cease operation after three months — unless he seeks additional reconsideration or judicial review which he is expected to do. So the story is far from over.

VHF MARITIME FREQUENCIES TO BE AUCTIONED

First HF Auctions Delayed

The FCC has "streamlined" the licensing process for VHF public coast stations in the maritime service (*FCC Rules Part 80*). Future licenses for these stations, which provide telephone interconnection to maritime and some land mobile users, will be issued to the highest bidder. VHF public coast communications use 157.1875- 157.45 MHz (ship transmit) and 161.775-162.0125 MHz (coast transmit).

By a July 9 order in PR Docket 92-257, the FCC divided the nation into nine geographic regions near major waterways, based on Coast Guard districts, and 33 "in-land" licensing regions based on economic criteria. Only one licensee will be permitted for all currently unassigned channels in each region.

"Each geographic licensee will be permitted to place stations anywhere within its region, on land or water, and to serve vessels or units on land provided that marine-originating traffic is given priority and incumbent operations are protected," the FCC said.

Public coast stations that serve rivers, bays and inland lakes must maintain a continuous safety watch on VHF channel 16 (156.8 MHz). The FCC will exempt coast stations from this requirement under some conditions (for example, if federal, state or local governments maintain watch on the channel).

"High Seas" (HF) public coast stations will be reviewed in a future, "more comprehensive reexamination," the FCC said. Mutually-exclusive applications for high seas stations, and for automated marine stations in the 220 MHz band, can't be resolved until the FCC adopts auction procedures for those stations, the agency noted.

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LATEST ACTIONS IN "OPERATION GANGPLANK"

A sign on the FCC's Washington, D.C. Communications Center warns of "Operation Gangplank" in progress. The Center is the master control for the Commission's enforcement monitoring system, and pirate radio operators have been keeping the Gangplank crew very busy.

The latest unlicensed station to be ordered to walk the gangplank is Micro Kind Radio (105.9 MHz), San Marcos, Texas. FCC Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) Richard L. Sippel has directed the station off the air, but without effect at this time.

The ALJ also ordered the station's operator, Joseph F. Ptak, to pay an \$11,000 fine. Ptak maintains that he is only one of many individuals connected with the station.

Micro Kind became well known over the last several months for its extensive community programming, including local candidate forums, election coverage and emergency weather broadcasts, as well as for defying FCC agents' direct instructions to stop broadcasting. The station is a branch of the Hays County Guardian publishing and cable TV operation.

Ptak had applied to the FCC's Gettysburg office for a waiver of the rules that prohibit micro broadcasting. But Judge Sippel called the Ptak request "informal and unsupported" and said "he has not met the standard requiring the Commission to give any consideration to the request." The ALJ also called "clearly erroneous" Ptak's position that the Constitution protects his unlicensed broadcast activities.

The ALJ ordered Ptak, and "all persons in active concert or participation" with him, to cease and desist from making radio transmissions within the U.S. or to do any act to cause unauthorized transmissions or enable them to occur.

At presstime, Ptak had not been officially served with the ALJ's decision. The station remains on the air. Within a week, he told us, Micro Kind Radio will move its studio to the San Marcos City Hall or Courthouse, "and the FCC will have to go there to take this station from the community."

He said that since the FCC's announcement of the ALJ's decision, demand for airtime on the station has increased and no programs have been canceled. Because he is personally named in the decision, however, Ptak said that he probably won't be actively involved in the station in the future.

He also told us that micro broadcasters are developing schemes that would make the participating individuals harder for the FCC to locate. One approach, he said, would involve encrypted feeds of programming from studios to multiple unattended transmitters deployed in a coverage area.

Meanwhile, the FCC scored another hit in U.S. District Court against an unauthorized broadcaster. Salvatore DeRogatis, in Howell, NJ, operated a station identified as "Oldies 104.7" and "WFHR."

FCC agents seized the station's equipment in September 1997, but according to the Commission, DeRogatis continued to broadcast. On June 30, 1998, New Jersey District Court judge Katharine S. Hayden found that the government's "unopposed arguments" were "persuasive" and that it was entitled to judgment as a matter of law. Judge Hayden enjoined DeRogatis from continuing to operate his station.

Microbroadcasting Conference Critical of FCC SMALL PIRATE STATION OPERATES AT LECTURE

A June 30 conference in Washington, D.C. on low-power broadcasting culminated in the demonstration of an unlicensed FM transmitter, in front of an audience of FCC officials, journalists and policymakers. The FCC made no attempt to halt the transmission, which was made into a resistive dummy load that radiated sufficiently to be picked up on a receiver in the back of the lecture hall.

(The transmitter appeared to be a \$120.00 Panaxis FMX, which is sold as a non-FCC regulated kit (or assembled, but for export only). The 2 to 500 milliwatt unit, with coax connector, is not FCC certified and apparently may not legally be operated over the air in the U.S. Another version with permanent 20" antenna and fixed power level is FCC-certified.)

The operator was "Pete triDish" (petri dish), self-described pirate broadcaster from Radio Mutiny of Philadelphia, which the FCC shut down on June 22. He operated the transmitter to demonstrate the small size and low cost of a low-power station.

Mr. triDish was the featured speaker at the conference, titled "Microbroadcasting and the War for the Airwaves." The sponsor was the "Cato Institute," a Washington "think tank" that espouses strictly limited governmental powers. The conference occurred in a period of intense activity in microbroadcasting, with an estimated 100 stations on the air, court rulings and appeals, equipment seizures, and enforcement actions against operators.

"Microbroadcasting," according to the Cato Institute, "stands ready to revolutionize broadcast speech in the same way that the Internet has revolutionized print speech, giving voice to a diversity of viewpoints and fulfilling the promise of the First Amendment."

Radio Mutiny had broadcast remotely from historic national landmarks such as the Liberty Bell and Benjamin Franklin's printing press. Its programs covered such topics as AIDS education; prison reform; Native American

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issues; and even the impact of local deregulation of electricity. After several FCC warnings, "we publicly challenged FCC Chairman William Kennard to come out and put the handcuffs on us in person."

"Unfortunately, he didn't show up to arrest us in front of the Liberty Bell, but finally our station was taken off the air by Richard Lee, the FCC Chief of Compliance and Information," triDish said.

(According to reports, the station was off the air at the time. Lee allegedly placed the station back on the air only to take the microphone and announce he was shutting it down.)

Also speaking at the conference was Jesse Walker, author of a report that points to federal funding as the source of widespread dissatisfaction with public radio. He recommends defunding the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which he believes has fostered noncommercial radio stations' rejection of volunteer, controversial, local community programming in favor of inoffensive national shows and popular music.

The next speech concerned North Dakota farmer Roy Neset. Mr. Neset's attorney, Scott Bullock of the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Justice, told the conference that Neset operated a 1 W transmitter with a 30 W amplifier, to broadcast primarily over his own property "almost literally in the middle of nowhere." This transmitter rebroadcast, with written permission, the signal of a Colorado station whose programming Neset and his neighbors liked.

Although Neset operated on 88.3 MHz FM, a local AM radio station complained to the FCC, which ordered Neset to shut down. On June 24, the FCC successfully obtained a U.S. District Court injunction against Neset, forbidding him from operating the unlicensed station. The court rejected Neset's arguments that the FCC rules restricted his First Amendment rights.

"The FCC argued--and so far the courts have accepted -- that even a defendant in an enforcement action cannot raise constitutional defenses until he has first applied for a waiver with the FCC," Bullock said. "Of course, acceptance of this argument means that there can never be effective judicial review of any FCC action unless the person has first gone through the FCC's long, arduous and expensive waiver process.

"Under this theory, the FCC can prevent judicial review of its actions simply by having the waiver provision on the books--even if in actual fact, waivers are almost never granted," he said. Bullock intends to appeal the injunction.

Meanwhile, on June 26, attorneys for Berkeley broadcast engineer Stephen Dunifer appealed a court decision that enjoined him from operating an unlicensed

station or helping anyone else to do so. (*see W5YI Report, July 15, 1998*).

Dunifer operated Free Radio Berkeley (FRB) since 1993, while the FCC waited for a district court judge to decide whether or not to grant the injunction.

"At no time during that three year period has FRB interfered with the signals of other stations, or caused any threat to security vehicles or frequencies," his attorneys stated. "Instead, the station has provided a voice for a significant number of individuals in the Berkeley/Oakland community who would not otherwise have ever been able to communicate with their neighbors over the airwaves."

"There are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of similar stations that have taken to the airwaves in response to the FCC's refusal to carry out its responsibility to allocate licenses 'in the public interest.' What all of these stations share in common is the realization that the FCC has historically served, and continues to serve, as little more than a mouthpiece for the multi-billion dollar broadcasting industry, and in particular, the National Association of Broadcasters."

As to the court's finding that Dunifer could not challenge FCC regulations because he had not applied for a waiver of FCC rules, the attorneys said that "it is difficult to understand" why Dunifer's lengthy filings did not satisfy the FCC. "As the government has pointed out to the Court, it has voluminous information concerning every aspect of defendant's transmissions, ranging from pictures of the antenna used, to copies of actual broadcasts." The FCC actually knows more about Dunifer's equipment and broadcasts, they observed, than it does about stations that actually apply for licenses.

"The obstacle course that the FCC has established for licensing full-power commercial broadcasters is so daunting and overwhelming that no microstation could ever pass muster in that context. It is as if the government demanded that mothers taking splinters out of their children's fingers comply with the regulatory requirements for an institution engaging in heart surgery," the attorneys stated.

"That the FCC has no interest whatsoever in granting or even considering waivers to any of these stations, is plainly illustrated by the nationwide assault that has been made on these stations by the FCC since this Court's decision was issued. In the last eight days, dozens of microbroadcasters have been told that if they do not discontinue broadcasting, they will be arrested."

"The licensing process established by the FCC is nothing short of a barbed-wire fence designed to keep out the riffraff. To say that such procedures and allocations can only be challenged by complying with them is the sort of Alice in Wonderland analysis that turns justice on its head," they concluded.